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Transformations of Late Antiquity

Essays for Peter Brown

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A World Full of Stories

Charlotte Roueché

One of the many lessons which Peter Brown has taught us, to the extent that we now take it as axiomatic, is that understanding the late antique world requires us to escape from a Graeco-Roman strait-jacket, and listen carefully to a wider range of sources. Breaking the mould in this way is not straightforward; the old habits of thought have great elasticity. One area where this is evident is in the study of late antique spectacles, theatrical and other performances, where the old ideas of decline remain very strong, and the authoritative discourse of fine users of Greek, such as Libanius or John Chrysostom, is hard to resist. I would like to revisit some of the evidence, as a small tribute to Peter; and I would like to point out that the study of the late antique world may also shine light back into the earlier centuries of the Roman Empire.

Over the last few decades it has become increasingly clear that vigorous theatrical performances of some kind continued to be presented throughout Late Antiquity. What remains far harder to establish – and I would say as much for the Roman as for the late Roman period – is what, on the many days of performance during the year, the audiences actually saw and heard. There was an extraordinary volume of shows to be provided – several times a year in cities all over the empire; and we know, at least for Rome, that the number of festival occasions was increasing into the fourth century.¹ The number and quality of performers will have varied greatly – from the fêted pantomime dancers of Rome or Constantinople to the group of travelling actors whose names are recorded on a wall at Dura-Europus.² While we have developed a clearer understanding of the different types of performance – pantomime, mime, etc – it is probably rash to assume that these demarcations were absolute: the travelling performers in small provincial towns were probably able to offer a range of entertainments. The story of Pelagia describes her as ‘the leading mime-actress of Antioch, who was also the leader of the chorus-girls of the pantomime performer’, ἡ πρώτη τῶν μιμᾶδων Ἀντιοχείας; αὕτη δὲ ἦν καὶ ἡ πρώτη τῶν χορευτρίων τοῦ ὀρχηστοῦ.³

¹ M. Salzman, *On Roman Time: the Codex-Calendar of 354* (Berkeley, CA, 1990).

² H. Immerwahr in M.I. Rostovtzeff *et al.* (eds), *Dura Excavations: Preliminary Report* ix, 1 (New Haven, CT, 1944), Appendix 2, pp. 203–65.

³ P. Petitmengin *et al.*, *Pélagie la pénitente: métamorphoses d'une légende* (Paris, 1981), i, ed. B. Flusin, p. 78, récit p. 4, cited by C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias* (London, 1993), pp. 26–7.

Our knowledge of the kind of performance on offer is steadily increasing, to show an increasingly wide range of activities. To the camel-jumping father of Theodore of Sykeon can now be added various acts recorded in the circus programmes that have been found at Oxyrhynchus. Alan Cameron knew of one (*P. Oxy.* 2707), but two more have now been published (*P. Bingen* 128 and *P. Harrauer* 56). What is perhaps less easy to grasp is what kinds of story the audiences saw presented by mime actors and by pantomimes. We have the tantalizing fragments of some mimes – which should be sufficient to alert us to the range of material; we tend to assume that pantomime was more restricted in its canon, but we may well be over-influenced by the view from the big cities.

The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite describes events in Mesopotamia – that is, Edessa and the surrounding areas – in the period 494–506, for much of which the area was being fought over by the Romans and the Sassanians.⁴ The author makes several mentions of pagan practices at Edessa,⁵ which he tends to present in explanation of various catastrophes. He describes a festival ‘at which the pagan myths were chanted’ (30), ‘that evil festival of the Greek myths’ (46). It is clear that the presentation of these myths involved pantomimes; the edict of Anastasius banning pantomimes in 502 apparently curtailed the celebrations (46).⁶

But it may not be safe to assume that the stories so presented were all ‘Greek’ in the sense of being drawn from traditional Greek mythology. It is Glen Bowersock – Peter’s ally in several excellent enterprises – who drew our attention to the way in which Hellenic forms and structures could provide a vehicle for other cults: ‘the cults that were still flourishing in the time of John of Ephesus survived in the language and mythology of the Greeks’.⁷ The form of the pantomime performance was clearly understood as being Greek. Jacob of Serugh wrote his five metrical homilies *On the Spectacles of the Theatre* in the late fifth or early sixth century.⁸ He describes pantomime and perhaps also mime, in terms which suggest that these are current preoccupations for him; and, particularly in his fifth homily, he refers to a series of scenes from traditional Greek mythology – the affairs of Zeus, Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne, the birth of Aphrodite, the adventures of Heracles or Dionysus. The editor and translator of the text, C.A. Moss, pointed out, however, that these examples were by then a *topos* of Christian criticisms of pagan mythology, going back to the *Apology* of Aristides.⁹ It would, therefore, be rash to assume that

⁴ Frank Trombley and John Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Liverpool, 2000).

⁵ See Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua*, Introduction, pp. xxxix–xli.

⁶ Ibid. pp. xvi–xvii.

⁷ G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1990), p. 13.

⁸ Ed. and trans. C.A. Moss, *Le Muséon* 48 (1935): 87–112.

⁹ ‘Indeed these sections of the long lost *Apology* are almost identical in substance with the arguments employed by Jacob in his fifth homily’ (92–3) and are, as Moss goes on

the stories presented to the people of the towns of Syria – whether by mimes or pantomimes – were limited to the pure canon of Greek mythology. What is less clear is where we should look to find further evidence.

Much more material may be lurking in the themes used in the visual arts. As the mosaics of the Roman and Late Roman period emerge, more and more unusual themes and collocations are appearing. Another medium that very probably contains images from the theatre is that of graffito representations. It is well known that many graffiti all over the empire show gladiators; we are aware of them because they present few problems of identification. Martin Langner's excellent collection of graffiti includes about seventeen pages of scenes of gladiatorial combat, and another ten of *venationes*.¹⁰ Graffiti of actors may be less easy to recognize, except when they are found in context; Langner has three pages of such scenes. The stage buildings of the theatre at Ephesus provide an unusually rich collection of graffiti apparently representing performers. Some show scenes; others show individuals. In the scenes, characters apparently have their stage names (so Peleus, Thetis); it is less clear whether the single figures bear the name of stage characters, or of particular performers.¹¹

One block from the stage front was first recorded in 1898; the block is now (2006) lying face down, broken in two, northwest of the Theatre.¹² On the upper part of the face is a graffito of the head and shoulders of a man; above this is the inscription Καρμίλις β'. On the lower part of the same block is the graffito figure of a standing man. He is wearing a tunic. From his right hand hangs a fish; in his left hand is a (?) knife. Around his head is the label Γωλλαθίου, most probably the genitive of a name in -os, or -es (pl. 1).

When I published these images, I presented the two as separate, and associated each inscription with its image. But I now think that I was wrong; the layout on the block suggests we should read the texts together as Καρμίλις β' Γωλλαθίου. This would be a standard form of nomenclature – Karmilis, second of that name

to point out, congruent with a whole tradition of Christian apologetic probably drawn from a set of *testimonia* (93–4).

¹⁰ Martin Langner, *Antike Graffitizeichnungen: Motive, Gestaltung und Bedeutung* (Wiesbaden, 2001).

¹¹ C. Roueché, 'Images of Performance: New Evidence from Ephesus', in P.E. Easterling and E. Hall (eds), *Greek and Roman Actors* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 254–81.

¹² R. Heberdey recorded and drew the graffito in the epigraphic notebook (*Skizzenbuch*) for 1898, no. 436. The *Skizzenbücher* are now in the Archaeological Institute in Vienna; he also made a squeeze, which was published in *Inschriften von Ephesos*, ed. Wankel and Merkelbach (Bonn, 1979–84), 2092.2 (whence *PHI* 2894: see Donald F. McCabe, *Corpus of Ephesos Inscriptions*, 1991, and Michael Alpers, Helmut Halfmann, John Mansfield and Christoph Schäfer, *Supplementum Ephesium*, 1995 in *Searchable Greek Inscriptions*, The Packard Humanities Institute at <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions>). The graffito was found again in 1994, drawn by H. Cevizoglu, and photographed. Roueché, 'Images of Performance', no. 7 is based upon this whole sequence of publications.

descended from Gollathios. We should therefore either interpret these graffiti as two images of the same actor, Karmilis, or one of the grandson (above) and one, below, of the grandfather, in a favourite role. Both names are unparalleled, and may very probably be stage names, as was common for performers. An image of a performer at Aphrodisias is accompanied by the label Καρμιλαινός, perhaps from the same root as Karmilis – or describing a member of the same troupe?¹³ The name Gollathios strongly suggests an Eastern Semitic origin for the name, and perhaps for the performer.

The lower performer is wearing ‘oriental’ dress – the *skaramangion* – a tunic with decoration at the neck, down the front and at the hem; the sleeve is attached well below the shoulder. There are several parallels, for example, at Palmyra.¹⁴ His belt is also fairly standard ‘eastern’ wear: it resembles, for example, that worn by St Menas in a fifth-century ivory.¹⁵ It may be that he specialized in exotic parts, as a stock ‘oriental’ character. But the posture, and the way of carrying the fish, recall a famous character from the East – that of Tobias.

The story of Tobias is found in the Book of Tobit, included in the apocrypha of the Old Testament.¹⁶ Tobit was a pious Jew who was taken as a captive to Nineveh. In his old age he became blind, and also impoverished; so he sent his son, Tobias, to collect ten talents of silver that he had deposited with a friend in Media. Tobias was accompanied by a helpful stranger who turned out to be the angel Raphael. There are several plots and subplots: but among other things Tobias catches a fish in the Tigris. On the advice of Raphael he takes the fish’s entrails on his journey. He uses them twice. Firstly, in Media he meets a beautiful relation, called Sarah; he uses the entrails to drive away the demon that has until then killed everyone who gets engaged to her. He marries Sarah, and returns to Nineveh, where he uses the entrails to cure Tobit’s blindness.

Before 1952, the text was known in a variety of translations into Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Sahidic and Armenian. But the history of the text was transformed after fragments of several manuscripts, four in Aramaic and one in Hebrew, were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁷ The earliest of these dates to 100 BC, and it is now thought that the text was originally composed in Hebrew or Aramaic.¹⁸ The date of composition is currently put at about 200 BC, although this is still a matter of

¹³ Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, p. 11, A.ii.

¹⁴ For excellent illustrations, see K. Tanabe, *Sculptures of Palmyra*, i (Tokyo, 1986), plates 117, 121 (for the sleeve seam), 134, 209–10, 431, 433–5, 437.

¹⁵ Most easily seen in R. Ousterhout, *The Blessings of Pilgrimage* (Urbana, 1990), plate 9.

¹⁶ See most recently the study by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Berlin, 2003).

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, pp. 3–17.

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, pp. 18–28, discusses the languages, and suggests an original in Aramaic, translated into Hebrew (p. 25).

discussion.¹⁹ But the textual tradition is exceptionally complex, suggesting a lively independent life for different branches of the tradition in several languages.²⁰

The book was known to Christians from early on, although there was considerable disagreement as to whether it was canonical.²¹ Its imagery appears in Christian iconography at least from the fourth century, when Tobias is portrayed on several occasions on Christian sarcophagi, and in the catacombs.²² The image is not very widespread, not least because of the problems of depiction. In the story, Tobias catches the fish, extracts its entrails, and cooks and eats the rest; it is the entrails that he takes on his journey. This does not lend itself to visual representation. Many of the early representations show Tobit plunging his hand into the mouth of the fish.²³

But an iconography of a standing or running Tobias, carrying a complete fish, does emerge. One gold-glass representation shows him with his hand in the mouth of the fish, but with the fish hanging down from his arm – an image that seems halfway to that of Tobias carrying it.²⁴ A drawing of a lost mosaic from the church of Santa Costanza in Rome shows him standing with the fish in both hands.²⁵ He appears as a standing figure in the New Catacomb of the Via Latina; he is naked except for a loincloth. He holds a fish, hanging from its mouth, in his right hand, and a (?) basket in his left.²⁶ In the first half of the fourth century, he is found in the Catacomb of Thrasion: in a scene to the left of a ‘Good Shepherd’ Tobias stands (with other damaged figures to his right). He is robed, and holds a fish in his right hand, which he is stretching across his body, to extend to the left.²⁷ In the mid fourth

¹⁹ On the date, Fitzmyer (pp. 50–52) suggests perhaps late second or early first century BC (225–175); see also C.A. Moore, *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, 1996), pp. 40–42.

²⁰ See the edition of the various texts by Stuart Weeks, Simon J. Gathercole and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Tobit: Texts from the Principal Ancient and Medieval Traditions* (Berlin, 2004).

²¹ Moore, *Tobit*, p. 52.

²² M. Perraymond, art. ‘Tobias’, in F. Bisconti (ed.), *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (Vatican City, 2000), pp. 287–8.

²³ For example, on most of the representations on gold glass in the Vatican, see C.R. Morey, *The Gold-glass Collection of the Vatican Library with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-glass Collections*, ed. G. Ferrari (Vatican City, 1959), nos 153–5; see also F. Zanchi Roppo, *Vetri paleocristiani a figure d’oro conservati in Italia* (Bologna, 1969).

²⁴ K. Weitzmann (ed.), *The Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York, 1979), pp. 430–31, no. 388.

²⁵ H. Stern, ‘Les Mosaiques de l’église de Sainte-Constance à Rome’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1952): 157–218, at pp. 175–6.

²⁶ A. Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomba di Via Latina* (Vatican City, 1960), pp. 48–9 and plate XVIII. Image republished in A. Ferrua, *Catacombe sconosciute: una pinacoteca del IV secolo sotto la Via Latina* (Florence, 1990), p. 44.

²⁷ J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg, 1903), plate 164, 2; A. Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (Vatican City, *Transformations of Late Antiquity*, Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis.

century, he is shown in the Catacombe dei Giordani; here he is naked except for a loincloth. He is running to his right, holding the fish in his right hand; in his left he holds a long (?) stick, which broadens out above and is supported on his shoulder.²⁸ He was depicted in a lost image from Santa Domitilla; again he is naked, with a long staff in his left hand and the fish in his right.²⁹ The figure is found on at least one sarcophagus, from the Cimiterion di S. Sebastiano (Rome), dated to the first quarter of the fourth century: here Tobias, in petasos and exomis, turns to his left, holding from his right hand a fish.³⁰ And there is at least one representation of him in this way on gold-glass, dated to the first half of the fourth century.³¹

It therefore appears that the figure of Tobias, holding a fish, was current – if not widespread – by the fourth century. The theatre graffiti at Ephesus seem to date to the fourth or fifth century, and it is therefore not impossible that the graffiti figure could be recognized as Tobias. This raises the question as to whether the story of Tobias could have been presented as a drama. The story contains various moral messages – it extols filial piety (shown by Tobias), almsgiving and reverence towards the dead (characteristics of Tobit) and chastity (exhibited by Sarah); more generally, it shows God as acting, by means of an angel, to protect pious Jews. It also contains various wise observations and apothegms, in particular a speech by Tobit to Tobias. In this it resembles other Near-Eastern literature, to which it may be structurally connected. Tobit has a nephew, Achiacarus, who has been identified with Ahikar (*Tobit* 2.1). Ahikar, based almost certainly on a historical figure, is a character found in ancient Near-Eastern literature as chancellor to Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and is characterized by his wisdom and good counsel. The story of Ahikar, perhaps written in the early seventh century in Northern Syria, describes his relationship with an ungrateful nephew who tries to murder him.³² Within the framework of the story, Ahikar presents a series of wise admonitions, which may well have circulated separately; but both wisdom and story were widespread.

In 1911, an Aramaic collection of the proverbs was published from a papyrus of the late fifth century BC excavated in 1906–08 at Elephantine.³³ This discovery led

1993), p. 11, no. 5.

²⁸ Wilpert, *Malereien*, plate 212; Nestori, *Repertorio*, p. 14, no. 6.

²⁹ Nestori, *Repertorio*, p. 125, no. 31; Wilpert, *Malereien*, pp. 53–4: ‘Als nackter Jüngling, der in der Linken ein langen Stab und in der Rechten einen Fisch trägt’. For the symbolism, see pp. 384–7.

³⁰ G. Bovini, H. Brandenburg and F.W. Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, i: Rom und Ostia (Wiesbaden, 1967), p. 176.

³¹ Morey and Ferrari, *Gold-glass*, p. 156; Zanchi Roppo, *Vetri paleocristiani*, p. 134: Tobias wears a tunic and pallium; he holds the fish hanging from his right hand; in his left he has a long (?) staff, widening at the top, which rests in the crook of his arm.

³² For the date, see J.M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore, MD, 1983), pp. 19–20.

³³ *P. Berol.* 13446; most recently edited by Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs*. See also Lindenberger’s translation of *The Words of Ahiqar*, with introduction and notes, *Transformations of Late Antiquity*, Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis. © Ashgate Publishing, 2009

to further study of the relationship of the stories of Ahikar and of Tobias, and also of the relationship of the story of Ahikar to the Life of Aesop.³⁴ All these texts are richly represented in all the languages of the Near East, over many centuries. Traces of the story of Ahikar have been detected in the Greek literature of the fifth century BC;³⁵ centuries later the story can also be related to narratives in the *Thousand and One Nights*;³⁶ the long career of the *Life of Aesop* has also been widely studied.³⁷ All combine adventure narratives with the conveying of good advice, in a format that was to remain popular from the first millennium BC until the Middle Ages. All travelled to the West: most remarkably, the figure of Ahikar has been identified on a mosaic of the mid third century AD in Trier, shown seated next to the muse Polymnia.³⁸ While some commentators have seen this as suggesting that the owner of the house came from the Eastern Empire, it may instead indicate the mobility of such stories. It is common to talk of such traditions as ‘travelling’, or ‘moving’; but this raises issues as to the vehicle of their transportation. One such vehicle may have been theatrical performance.

The story of Tobit and Tobias was widespread in the Near East in the Graeco-Roman period, and could, for that reason, have been adapted for theatrical presentation. But the association with gnostic literature, and collections of proverbial wisdom, may make this even more probable. It is easy to take at face value the criticisms of ancient authors – adopted by Christian writers – of theatrical performances as corrupting or frivolous. But in fact there is a long tradition of expecting the theatrical show to include uplifting and educational material. This might be seen as more characteristic of tragedy. In about AD 127, the tragic poet G. Julius Longianus was honoured by the people of Halicarnassus: he ‘gave demonstrations of poems of every kind, by which he both delighted the older and improved the younger’ and ‘it has also been voted that there should be public

in J. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii (New York, 1985), pp. 479–507.

³⁴ R. Smend, *Alter und Herkunft des Achikar-Romans und sein Verhältnis zu Aesop* (Giessen, 1908); F.C. Conybeare, Rendel Harris and A.S. Lewis, *The Story of Ahikar* (Cambridge, 1898, expanded 2nd edn 1913). The edition in R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ii: *Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 715–84 is based on the 1898 edition. On Tobit and Ahikar, see now Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, pp. 36–8.

³⁵ See, for example, M.J. Luzzatto, ‘Greci e Vicino Oriente: tracce della ‘Storia di Ahikar’ nella cultura greca tra VI e V secolo a.C.’, *Quaderni di Storia* 36 (1992): 5–84.

³⁶ Harris in Conybeare *et al.*, *The Story of Ahikar*, explored the relationship of the Thousand and One Nights tradition to the Judaeo-Christian tradition (pp. vii–xiv), and especially Ahikar and Tobit (pp. xiv–xvi).

³⁷ Harris in Conybeare *et al.*, *The Story of Ahikar*, pp. xvi–xx. See also B.E. Perry, *Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop* (Haverford, PA, 1936), p. vii.

³⁸ Most recently published and discussed by D. Metzler, ‘Ahikar in Trier’, in D. Ahrens (ed.), *Thiasos ton Mouson, Studien zu Antike und Christentum: Festschrift für Josef Fink zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna, 1984), pp. 97–107 and plate 5.

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presentation of his books in the libraries in our city, so that the young men may be educated in these also, in the same way as in the writings of the ancients'.³⁹

But wisdom and guidance were also an important part of the comic and mime tradition – particularly as delivered in commonplaces and sayings.⁴⁰ In the first century BC the mime author Publilius Syrus was a source of such sayings.⁴¹ Most famously of all, the sayings embedded in the plays of Menander were extracted and assembled, to circulate, in many languages, long after the full texts of his plays had been lost. Pat Easterling has argued that with Menander, as with Syrus, the availability of the sayings perhaps made it less necessary to continue to copy and retain the texts.⁴² And the Menander tradition was intertwined with the Aesopic tradition.⁴³

Against this background, the story of Tobias would offer an excellent choice for a play. It has an exciting story, from which plays were drawn in the western Middle Ages and the renaissance;⁴⁴ and it serves as a vehicle for moral advice. It is arguably anachronistic to consider that such themes would have been seen as inappropriate – or even blasphemous. In third-century Smyrna, Pionius can be portrayed as addressing a mixed crowd, of Jews and pagans, in a speech full of references to Old Testament stories: it is worth considering how such stories may have circulated.⁴⁵ We have, for example, the fragments of a tragedy, in Greek, on the Exodus; the author, Ezekiel, was described by Clement of Alexandria as the poet of Jewish tragedies.⁴⁶ We know that scenes of Christian liturgy were sometimes presented; this is implicit for example in the stories of actors who were converted by a stage baptism (Gelasinos, Porphyrius).⁴⁷ But the story of Ardalio

³⁹ Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, no. 88.

⁴⁰ See F. Giancotti, *Mimo e gnome: Studio su Decimo Laberio e Publilio Siro* (Messina/Firenze, 1967).

⁴¹ C.M. Lucarini, 'Publilio Siro e la tradizione gnomologica', in M.S. Funghi (ed.), *Aspetti di letteratura gnomica nel mondo antico* (Firenze, 2003), pp. 225–39.

⁴² P.E. Easterling, 'Menander: Loss and Survival', in A. Griffiths (ed.), *Stage Directions: Essays in Ancient Drama in Honour of E.W. Handley* (London: 1995), pp. 153–60.

⁴³ M.J. Luzzatto, 'Sentenze di Menandro e *Vita Aesopi*', in Funghi, *Aspetti*, pp. 35–52.

⁴⁴ L. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), especially p. 216.

⁴⁵ *Le martyre de Pionios, prêtre de Smyrne*, édité, traduit et commenté par Louis Robert; mis au point complété par G.W. Bowersock et C.P. Jones (Washington, DC, 1994).

⁴⁶ Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii: 803–19; see also E.S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), pp. 148–58.

⁴⁷ See W. Weismann, *Kirche und Schauspiele: die Schauspiele im Urteil der lateinischen Kirchenväter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustin* (Würzburg, 1972).

describes a mime actor who performed the execution of a Christian martyr on stage, with great success. Upon dying he seems to have gone off the stage, and then reappeared to announce that he was a Christian.⁴⁸ This has interesting implications for the dissemination of Christian stories about their heroes. I would argue that the scale of entertainments in the Roman Empire – over such a wide area and so many centuries – will have required a vast supply of plots. It may be that theatrical presentations helped to spread knowledge of a far wider range of mythologies and stories than we have tended to imagine.

There remains much more to be done before the hypotheses advanced here can be proved. But I think it is useful to be reminded of the rich supply of stories and story-telling which existed throughout the Roman Empire – one response to which may have been the development of a new genre of stories, the lives and adventures of the saints, whose understanding is indissolubly linked for us with the scholarship of Peter Brown.

⁴⁸ Ardalio: *Acta sanctorum* for April 17 (PG 117.408).

